

United States Post Office (Federal Building)
(now City of Clarksville, Department of
Electricity)
Southwest corner of Commerce and
South Second Streets
Clarksville
Montgomery County
Tennessee

HABS No. TENN-38

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. TENN-38

UNITED STATES POST OFFICE (FEDERAL BUILDING)
(NOW CITY OF CLARKSVILLE, DEPARTMENT OF ELECTRICITY)

Location: Southwest corner of Commerce and South Second Streets,
Clarksville, Montgomery County, Tennessee
Latitude: 36°31'34" Longitude: 87°21'31"

Present Owner: The City of Clarksville

Present Occupant: Department of Electricity, City of Clarksville

Present Use: Offices

Statement of
Significance: This building is unusually flamboyant in style for
its size. Its highly pitched roof with large eagles
on the four corners, its steep gabled windows, and
its elaborate terra-cotta ornamentation combine to
give importance to what is a relatively small build-
ing. Designed as a post office for the city of
Clarksville, it is unique in the State.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1897-1898.
2. Architect: According to drawings on file with the Public Buildings Service of the General Services Administration, Washington, D. C., the architect was William Martin Aiken--supervising architect of the Treasury 1895-97. The superintendent of construction was David A. Murphy, who was described as "a practical builder and building superintendent." Before coming to Clarksville, he had served as a Superintendent of Construction for United States government buildings in Ohio, Kentucky, and Texas. Mr. Murphy had also had a career as a newspaper editor between 1861 and 1868. His appointment was from President William McKinley, for whom he had written a campaign song.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The lot on which the building stands was purchased May 26, 1894, by the U. S. Government for \$6,135.41. Appropriations for construction were made by Congressional Acts of August 5, 1892, March 3, 1893, and March 2, 1895. In 1936 the property was sold to the City of Clarksville.
4. Original plans and construction: The blueprints of the building are on file with the Public Buildings Service in

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Washington. A history of its construction as published in the Clarksville newspaper, The Daily Leaf-Chronicle for November 1, 1898, records the following:

"1897, July 2	Captain David A. Murphy assigned as Superintendent.
3	Advertised for proposals.
8	Superintendent Murphy arrived at Clarksville.
15	Superintendent's office opened in Queen City Warehouse.
August 2	Bids Opened in Washington, D. C.
10	Contract awarded to Mr. Charles A. Moses of Chicago, Illinois.
September 1	Ground broken by Mayor of Clarksville, Dr. N. L. Carney.
15	Excavation in basement completed.
October 15	Major O. J. Shipley, Contractor's Superintendent, arrived at Clarksville.
November 6	First brick laid by Miss Alice M. Drane, aged 11.
December 1	Cornerstone laid by masons and citizens of Clarksville.
15	Basement story, Bedford limestone and common brick, completed.
"1898, January 31	First story, facing brick and terra cotta trimmings completed.
February 15	Work on building stopped for lack of roof material.
April 1	Work on building resumed.
June 1	Steel trusses for roof construction in place.
August 15	Sheathing paper, slate, and copper work in roof completed.
September 15	Site sodded and grass growing.
30	Plastering in first story and gallery completed.
October 15	Concrete floor in basement completed.
	Heating apparatus completed and inspected.
18	Marble tiling and wainscoting in place, completed.
	Electric lighting system in place and inspected.
	Lock boxes, drawers, etc. in Post Office screen.
November 2	Wood joinery and interior finish completed.
5	Plumbing completed.
	Painting throughout the building completed.
7	Building ready for final inspection and acceptance.

14 Building ready for occupancy by the Post-master of Clarksville."

The cost of the building was \$43,033.96, exclusive of its site.

5. Alterations and additions: In 1938 the Department of Electricity lowered the ceilings by installation of false ceilings in all areas of the main floor except the entrance lobby. At this time the stairway to the second floor was removed. An architect was not employed in this alteration, the work being done by local carpenters.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Record Group 121 (Public Buildings), Audio-Visual Division, National Archives, Washington, D. C. The same photograph preserved in the National Archives was used in the November 1, 1895, edition of a Clarksville newspaper, The Daily Leaf-Chronicle.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Public Buildings Service, General Services Administration, Washington, D. C.

Record Group 121, Center For Cartographic and Architectural Archives, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

Record Group 121, Textual Custodial Unit, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

- b. Secondary and published sources:

A History of Public Buildings under the Control of the Treasury Department (Exclusive of Marine Hospitals and Quarantine Stations). Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901.

The Daily Leaf-Chronicle (Clarksville, Tennessee), August 6, 1897; November 1, 1898.

Semi-Weekly Leaf Chronicle (Clarksville, Tennessee), December 3, 1897.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This late 19th-century post office building is unique in the State of Tennessee. Unusually flamboyant in style, its highly pitched roof with large eagles on the four corners, its steep gabled windows, and its elaborate terra cotta ornamentation combine to give the structure importance.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This one-and-a-half-story square building measures 62'-2" x 62'-2" and has a five-bay front.
2. Foundations: Smooth stone.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The exterior is of natural brick, with decorative terra-cotta around all openings and on the corners.
4. Structural system, framing: The roof has steel framing with rivets. There are load-bearing masonry walls.
5. Porches: There is a stoop on the east side.
6. Chimneys: There is one large brick chimney on the south side.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The arched main entrance contains double aluminum-framed glass doors of two panels each, with arched transom above.
 - b. Windows: Tripartite windows contain one-over-one-light double-hung rectangular sash in the center openings with arched transoms above. Smaller rectangular windows contain one-over-one-light double-hung sash.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The pyramidal roof has flared eaves and is surmounted by a cupola. The roofing is slate on long leaf pine.

- b. Dormers: There are twenty dormers--five dormers per side. A central gable dormer with curvilinear opening is flanked by hip-roof dormers, with two smaller hip-roof dormers above. All dormers are surmounted by pinnacles. There is a series of three stepped pinnacles on the angles of the roof line. The corners are surmounted by eagles on pedestals.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The entrance is on the Commerce Street side with a counter between the entry and the open office area. There are offices at either end of the entry lobby. The offices beyond the open secretary area on the open second level were originally used to view mail handlers secretly.
2. Flooring: The flooring is marble.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: There are painted plaster walls and an elaborate coffered plaster ceiling.
4. Doors: Interior doors have three panels with a glass panel above and two wooden panels below.
5. Special decorative features: Natural white oak trim is used extensively on the interior.

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: Situated at the corner of Commerce and South Second Streets, the post office faces east on Commerce Street.

Prepared by Roy C. Pledger
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
August 1971

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during the summer of 1971 as part of a cooperative project of the National Park Service, the Tennessee Historical Commission, and the Historic Sites Federation of Tennessee. The work represents the second phase of an extensive recording program to document the historic architecture of Middle Tennessee; it involved the recording of structures in the counties surrounding Nashville.

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The project was under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey. Supervisor of the recording team was Prof. Roy C. Pledger of Texas A & M University. The team was composed of John W. Kiser, Architectural Historian (University of Tennessee); Daryl P. Fortier, Architect (University of Minnesota); and student architects Gilbert M. Glaubinger (Rhode Island School of Design), Steve P. Roberts (Ohio State University), and Barry S. Williams (Texas A & M University). Photographs were made by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer.